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SUBJECT: Reaction: Vice-President Biden in Costa Rica

¶1. Summary: Vice President Joseph R. Biden traveled to Costa Rica March 29-30 to meet with Central American leaders following a trip to Chile where he attended a Progressive Governance Summit in Via del Mar. There was an overwhelming interest in covering the Vice-Presidential trip to Costa Rica even before the official announcement was made on March 12, 2009. In an editorial that appeared in leading daily, La Nacion, the overall positive tone of the media was captured indicating, "the Vice-President's presence in Costa Rica must be interpreted as part of a purpose that does not mean that we have to agree all the time, but that we have to develop a more horizontal and pragmatic nexus without losing track of the aspirations of development, democracy, security and peace." To date, over seventy articles have appeared in the local daily papers and wires, in addition to numerous television reports that have appeared in national and international news programs. End summary.

#### Bilateral and Multilateral Expectations from a Media Perspective

¶2. When President Arias announced that he would be hosting a bilateral meeting between Costa Rica and the United States as well as a multilateral meeting between Central American leaders and Vice-President Biden on March 30, the media began analyzing the significance of the visit. In an opinion article that appeared in daily, Al Dia, the Vice-President's visit to Costa Rica was described as symbolic in nature signifying that the visit could be indicative of a stronger alliance between Costa Rica and the United States. Also noted was that Costa Rica stands alone in a swarm of populist, Bolivarian and leftists within the region.

Local media made several references to the significance the Vice Presidential visit had in a regional context concluding that the trip could have a special meaning for the region's foreign policy. La Nacion published the Vice-President's OpEd, "A New Day for the Partnership of the Americas" on March 27 which outlined the Vice-President's objective in his travels to Latin America. "I am traveling to Central and South America to consult with Latin American leaders gathered in Chile and Costa Rica about the Summit and the challenges faced by the people of the Americas. These meetings are an important first step toward a new day in relations and building partnerships with and among the countries and people of the Hemisphere," said VP Biden.

#### Vice President Biden's Arrival in Costa Rica

¶3. Vice President Biden and his wife Dr. Jill Biden arrived in Costa Rica at 4:07 p.m. on March 29. U.S. Ambassador Peter Cianchette and his family met the Vice-President at the airport. In a written statement issued to the press upon his arrival, VP Biden highlighted, "Costa Rica and the United States not only have a strong partnership, but share a long-standing friendship with common values, including respect for democracy, state of law and human rights. This visit is an opportunity to meet with the leaders of the region and to strengthen already existing ties between the United States and Central America." Working with the White House Advance Team, the PAO and IO issued an arrival statement to the large media covering the arrival.

#### Press Coverage at the Presidential Office

¶4. The Public Affairs Section at the Embassy worked closely with staff at the Ministry of Communications to coordinate media coverage that took place at the Presidential Office including a photo spray of President Oscar Arias greeting Vice-President Biden, an official photo of the Vice-President with Central American leaders and a 40 minute press conference where over seventy journalists gathered from

local, regional and international media outlets.

#### VP Biden in Costa Rican Media Spotlight

¶15. Emphasizing the Obama Administration's "listening mode" and desire to strengthen relationships with the countries of Central America, Vice President Joseph Biden participated in a 40 minute press conference, following a meeting with Central American leaders that took place at the Presidential Office. After opening remarks by host and Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, VP Biden offered his own remarks, thanking the leaders for taking time out of busy schedules to come to the meeting, and emphasizing the White House interest in crafting policy with Central America, not for Central America.

Journalists were asked to prepare five questions which covered topics related to multi-lateral relations between the US and Central American countries, the global financial crisis, diplomatic relations with Cuba, drug-trafficking and immigration. All five questions were directed at VP Biden, who emphasized the importance of US interest in having a direct, face-to-face, transparent relationship with each President of the region. Requesting patience and commitment by the assembled leaders, Biden reiterated the need to work together for common progress on economic and other issues.

#### Dr. Biden Receives Rock Star Welcome with Costa Rican School Children

¶16. Dr. Jill Biden also received positive press coverage during her visit to local elementary school, Escuela Ciudadela de Pavas, located in one of the poorest neighborhoods of San Jose. Local daily, Tico Times reported, "as her husband and U.S. Vice President Joe Biden spent the morning speaking with Central American heads of state, Jill Biden opted for third graders." Emphasizing the importance of education and demonstrating the strength of ties between the United States and Costa Rica, Dr. Biden participated in an English class with third grade students. An English teacher herself, Dr. Biden immediately engaged with the students, observing and commenting on their work.

#### Wrap-up to a Successful VP Visit

¶17. Positive reports on the VP visit continue to be published by local media indicating that the visit was an overall success. The Tico Times reports, "U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden made few promises, but did seem to win some hearts and minds, during a much-watched, two-stop trip to Latin America."

¶18. Comment: Public Affairs staff worked around the clock with the WH advance team in the lead up and during the visit to ensure that information was accurately and prominently communicated to the widest possible audience. Utilizing new media, information about the visit was disseminated to the public on the Embassy website, Facebook page and through twitter. Photos and links to all media coverage are available upon request.

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